

LEED® for Commercial Interiors EQ 4.5: What is Option C?

The “new” option. When LEED for Commercial Interiors (LEED-CI) was introduced, there were only two ways to prove compliance with the Indoor Environmental Quality credit EQ 4.5 regarding “low emitting materials – systems furniture and seating.” One was GreenGuard® certification (Option A) and the other was a test method from the Environmental Protection Agency (Option B). In 2006, the U.S. Green Building Council approved Option C, the BIFMA method for testing and certifying emissions levels from systems furniture and seating. Allsteel was the first contract office furniture maker to adapt this method, which is more appropriate to the complexity of office furniture. Option C provides for the testing of individual components, testing by any qualified laboratory, certification by an independent, third-party certifying organization, and the availability of test results.

Testing and certification, a two-step process. The lab testing required to meet this standard can be done by any accredited laboratory (as opposed to GreenGuard’s exclusive arrangement with only one lab). Allsteel uses an independent, qualified laboratory, Berkeley Analytical Associates, to conduct its testing. A third-party certifying organization, Scientific Certification Systems (SCS), verifies test results as achieving the requirements of LEED-CI EQ 4.5 (SCS’s Indoor Advantage™ program) and/or the California 1350 specification (SCS’s Indoor Advantage Gold program), which is the most stringent and protective indoor air quality requirement in the United States. Two very important improvements in Option C are that 1.) Testing can be done on individual furniture components so if there is an emission result that is too high, it is possible to identify the source so improvements can be made; and 2.) The actual lab test results are provided rather than a simple pass/fail notification.

Finishes. Since Option C is based on a pre-defined “typical” workstation that includes fabrics and finishes, they needn’t be individually certified. EQ 4.1-4.4 do not apply to systems furniture or seating since all components are included in EQ 4.5. The end user cannot currently use veneer on open plan systems furniture to achieve the EQ 4.5 credit due to the wood finish emissions. A new finish that meets the requirements of LEED while still being protective of the wood is currently being evaluated by Allsteel. Since EQ 4.5 covers systems and seating only, veneer can be used on private office or conference room furniture without losing that point.

Why the confusion? Many designers refer to the LEED-CI Reference Guide or Rating System, which was printed before Option C was approved, so they don’t realize there is a better way to test and certify furniture. Proof is in the LEED-CI Credit Interpretation Rulings (CIRs) for EQ 4.5 on the USGBC website at www.usgbc.org. LEED-CI version 3.0 includes Option C and will eliminate this confusion in projects begun after June 26, 2009.

Allsteel furniture. Testing and certification are conducted annually. All of Allsteel’s furniture meets the requirements of LEED-CI EQ 4.5 (with no veneer on open plan systems) and Allsteel provides Indoor Advantage certificates to end users to support that credit.



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